

VZCZCXRO3175
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0462/01 3341905
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3001
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0360
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 FREETOWN 000462

NOFORN
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DOJ FOR DEA/OS/OSE (MCMANAMON)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2019
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE NARCOTICS WRAP-UP, 2009

REF: A. FREETOWN 270
[1](#)B. FREETOWN 424

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Sierra Leone continues to stay invested in the narcotics issue, and attempting to become more pro-active operationally despite resource constraints. International actors, including post, UK/SOCA, and the UN remain sources of support and encouragement, while also advancing our own strategic interests. The JDITF is experiencing some growing pains, including integrity and security issues, but has made some positive gains through low-level busts and increased intelligence-gathering efforts. New information indicates that though Sierra Leone is not a direct platform for narcotrafficking as it was before the 07/13/2008 plane bust, it is being used to support operations taking place in Guinea. These activities could embolden networks to establish or re-establish themselves here, particularly since a high-level of vigilance, even with political will from the executive branch, is nearly impossible to maintain in poverty-stricken countries. This cable will highlight the following topics: JDITF successes and setbacks; Sierra Leonean operational priorities; and international community involvement and intelligence. End Summary.

JDITF: SUCCESSES AND SETBACKS

[1](#)2. (C) The JDITF is pressing forward, focusing since the last update (reftel A) on promoting itself for donor recognition and support and conducting small-scale busts of cannabis farms and Nigerian mules. The main issue that continues to face the JDITF is its legal status, particularly vis a vis the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and a White Paper was drafted which will soon be presented to the National Security Council (NSC). The White Paper outlines the threat of transnational organized crime to Sierra Leone, and proposes that the NSC legally mandate the formal establishment of the JDITF, which will eventually be expanded into a transnational organized crime unit. Under the National Security and Central Intelligence Act (2002), the NSC can create sub-committees it deems necessary to fulfill its mandate without Cabinet and Parliamentary approval. While this will not take authority away from the NDLEA, it will give the JDITF solid legal and political legitimacy. Informed security contacts indicate that a revised National Drugs Control Act is expected in 2010, and could relegate the NDLEA back to a policy unit focusing on demand-reduction, rehabilitation, and public awareness.

13. (SBU) Regardless of the JDITF's technical status, donors continue to show interest in supporting it thanks to their regular outreach. The German government recently donated USD 500,000 through the UN to provide equipment and three vehicles, and a UN assessment team visited in November to start solidifying plans for the West African Coast Initiative (WACI), an element of which will establish transnational crime units in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Cote d'Ivoire. Should the TCU project be fully-funded, Sierra Leone will receive approximately USD 3,000,000 over three years. The assessment team consisted of representatives from UNODC, Interpol, UN-DPKO, and UNOWA, who stated their intent to focus on boosting intelligence-gathering and sharing efforts through the Office of National Security (ONS) and the Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU). There is currently no timeline for this project. On November 30, SOCA provided three vehicles for surveillance work, and has requested three more. The mini-Dublin Group, chaired by the British High Commissioner, had its second meeting in November.

14. (C) The JDITF's operational work has been hampered by resource constraints and an ongoing struggle to maintain integrity. The recent cannabis farm bust, "Operation Green Hay," netted several farmers and destroyed their crops, but some targets had been tipped off weeks prior (reftel B). The JDITF was also responsive to three alerts of potentially inbound, load-carrying flights in October, but leaks from the JDITF enforcement unit made public knowledge the fact that they had been placed on stand-by. The JDITF Management Board and external advisors are now reconsidering how best to grade intelligence, control access, and activate the task force's enforcement arm, as necessary. Open information-sharing, even

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at senior JDITF levels, appears to carry significant risks: ONS/CISU told Poloff that they will only share low-level intelligence with their SLP counterparts on the task force, and would only pass along "hot" information (i.e.: regarding significant cocaine loads or wanted traffickers) if absolutely necessary. Even in what is, by Sierra Leonean standards, an elite squad, the cadre of SLP officers involved below Assistant Inspector General (and JDITF Chairman) Morie Lengor, are proving themselves to be hard to fully trust.

SIERRA LEONEAN OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

15. (C) The Task Force remains focused on cannabis production as an area in which progress can be made, and recently found small amounts of what they believe to be crack cocaine during a routine marijuana seizure (Note: Drug identification is unreliable here, but the amounts were too small to send to the UK for testing. End Note.). It appears that large amounts of cannabis are being driven over the Guinean border and sold - one bale is equivalent to the price of an "okada" (motorcycle), which is a lucrative deal for an unemployed youth. Besides cannabis, the task force has also had some success focusing on Nigerian mules through intelligence-gathering and profiling. The SLP recently arrested four Nigerians at Lungi Airport on suspicion of drug trafficking: one proved to have 26 capsules of cocaine in his stomach, while the other three were clean - they remain detained for traveling on false Spanish documents. Officers have finally started collecting evidence during these incidents, including doing a check of all cell phones and documenting numbers and contacts (Note: Post passed an inventory of numbers from each of the suspects' phones to DEA/Accra. End Note.). While little evidence was seized beyond their phones and travel papers, the Sierra Leoneans are now interested in gathering and analyzing evidence themselves, rather than turning it over immediately to SOCA or bagging and ignoring it. The "Nkeke" case involving 26 capsules has also resulted in the arrest of three SLP officers assigned to Lungi: they allegedly stole 16 of the capsules to sell on their own before turning the suspect and

remaining cocaine over to the JDITF.

¶6. (C) The Nigerian network, previously unexplored, will likely create a significant amount of work for the task force. The Nigerian High Commissioner, Godson Echegile, reportedly pays informants to track Nigerian criminals in-country and has information to share regarding trafficking operations. He has allegedly been reticent to provide this information to the SLP, which he believes to be corrupt and ineffective, but may be willing to pass intelligence to the UN and other diplomats: UNIPSIL has made overtures to him, and he will likely be invited to the next mini-Dublin Group meeting. An approach by the CDA and British High Commissioner may also prove effective. At this point, the JDITF does not know where the Nigerians procure the cocaine, or where in Freetown it is packaged. We do know, though, that more Nigerians are traveling in and out of Sierra Leone than ever before: Immigration processed more than 400 Nigerians at Lungi between August and October.

¶7. (C) Besides new leads, the July 13, 2008 case continues to haunt the JDITF. Six individuals wanted in connection with the case returned to Sierra Leone from Guinea in September, including Narandas Emeric Edward Bangura, an employee of Gibrilla Kamara (GK). Narandas reportedly returned to Sierra Leone to re-establish GK's business and claim his frozen assets and property. The JDITF successfully surveilled and arrested the six men, but they were later granted bail despite SLP protests. The magistrate, who was likely bribed, agreed to rescind bail, but Narandas and the others had already fled. CISU suspects that Narandas re-joined his boss in Conakry. GK is a sore subject with Task Force members, but intelligence suggests that he is laying low in Guinea and will likely only return to Sierra Leone if forced to.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/INTELLIGENCE

¶8. (C/NF) The British are active in Sierra Leone, and attend the Integrated Intelligence Group meetings. Besides providing some operational support for JDITF surveillance and busts, they are also working their own investigations. One

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individual of interest is Mohib Shamel (Sierra Leonean cell no. 076-700-259), a Lebanese-Brit who works out of Birmingham and visits Sierra Leone every six weeks. The Shamel family is active in the mining sector here, and Mohib reportedly comes to Sierra Leone to do charity work in the Kono District. According to SOCA, however, he is connected to Daniel Kinahan, an Irish businessman involved in narcotrafficking throughout Europe and currently the target of a major investigation. SOCA believes that Shamel represents Kinahan in Sierra Leone, and that Kinahan may be interested in expanding his network to West Africa. Shamel is reportedly in communication with individuals who worked for/with the Perezes.

¶9. (C/NF) On the intelligence side, SOCA has received information that a meeting is expected to take place soon between three Colombians, one Dutch, and one Danish individual to discuss narco-trafficking opportunities in Guinea. If the meeting goes well, they will reportedly travel from Sierra Leone to Guinea: SOCA implied that the Colombians are already active in the sub-region, and that the Europeans are potential partners for them. While further information is classified and cannot be shared, SOCA contact said that they have names and numbers for the individuals, and may share more in the coming days or weeks.

¶10. (C) The Spanish have a new interest in Sierra Leone, based on a Sierra Leonean-flagged vessel that has been involved in human smuggling and linked to narcotics trafficking. The "Jean Marie" is a target of the Spanish Drugs and Organized Crime Unit, which placed a transponder on

it in Dakar in 2008. Suspected of carrying loads of people and possibly drugs between Sierra Leone/Liberia/Guinea and the Canary Islands, it also made a trip to the Delta de Orinoco area of Venezuela. In late 2008, it returned to Freetown from Venezuela and the transponder subsequently died or was removed. On November 25, the SOCA representative positively identified the Jean Marie at a Sierra Leone marina, following what some consider to be a lackluster CISU search for it (Note: The Jean Marie is owned by the uncle of CISU's Director General. Some feel he deliberately delayed the search, while others believe it simply wasn't a priority relative to other issues. There is no indication that the CISU DG is corrupt. End Note). Because the Spanish don't have a bilateral agreement with Sierra Leone to conduct operations, they will likely prevail upon SOCA to remove, and possibly replace, the transponder. One interesting note is that the vessel moored directly next to the Jean Marie in Freetown appears to be the same as the one it was photographed next to in Senegal.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The JDITF is struggling with expected issues, such as limited resources and maintaining operational integrity. While their efforts, particularly in addressing the new Nigerian concerns, are laudable, the enforcement branch is currently not trustworthy enough to handle sensitive information. They can and should be a partner in any significant initiatives, but only with the caveat that information and plans be carefully channeled through top leadership with controls placed on who knows what and when. This view is shared by others in the international community, including SOCA and the UK Advisor to ONS. The JDITF is currently cutting its teeth on low-level cases, and until they prove themselves ready for robust investigations, will continue to be somewhat marginalized by Sierra Leonean intelligence interests and others. That said, the JDITF Management Board is aware of the issues, and seeking to remedy them as best they can.

¶12. (C/NF) Comment, Con't: The Sierra Leoneans are currently not generating information about major narcotics interests in the country, but continue to track those linked to the Perezes, and surveilled Shamel on SOCA's behalf. Information about the possible meeting of Colombian and European interests indicates that Sierra Leone is, at the very least, seen as a "safe" location for meetings and possibly for logistics bases. Though Guinea appears to still be the preferred place for doing business, a change there could push activity to Sierra Leone. While capacity has somewhat increased to address an influx, there continues to be significant limitations in what Sierra Leone can do. End

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